

Jane's Defence Weekly
June 25, 2003

US Navy Considers The Implications Of Seabases

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The introduction of enhanced, networked seabases to deliver and support ground forces is a "fundamentally different approach" for the US Navy, and a number of questions remain before specific platforms and missions are defined, navy officials said.

The US Department of Defense (DoD) is advancing the seabasing concept as a way to enable US forces to deploy rapidly into a theatre of operations while overcoming anti-access measures and avoiding the complications of negotiating basing rights. Logistics, command-and-control and some fire support could remain at sea, while supporting US Marine Corps (USMC) and other ground forces inland.

"We're talking about projecting defence throughout the battlespace [and using] the maritime domain toward an advantage," Vice Adm Kevin Green, head of plans, policy and operations at navy headquarters, told *Jane's Defence Weekly*. "That is a fundamentally different approach to naval operations."

To consider the navy's role as solely to deliver ground and air forces to a land-based battle "ignores the tremendous potential of the seabase", he said.

The seabasing idea has attracted interest throughout the DoD as a possible alternative to fixed-site bases ashore for the marines, the US Army and possibly the US Air Force. This capability would likely involve large Mobile Offshore Bases (MOB), consisting of floating warehouses or runways. However, it would be a costly undertaking to produce MOB's in addition to the other enhancements the navy is pursuing, and is likely to result in resourcing decisions at some point, one official said.

Reliance on a seabase for logistics support will require a "change in thought process" for the marines, which are used to seeing their supplies follow them ashore and "having supply trucks continuously rolling up" when needed, said David Peveler, who heads the Navy Warfare Development Command's work on the subject.

Providing steady logistics is a challenge when the USMC operates far inland, as it did in the recent campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. A robust logistics capability from seabases will enable the marines to "eliminate the operational pause" in moving supplies ashore before going after an objective, Peveler said.

The implications of seabasing are currently the focus of a DoD study and navy wargames. For example, the use of seabases may demand common lift platforms, sustainment systems and networks across the armed services, said Arthur Cebrowski, director of the DoD's Office of Force Transformation. The same goes for a companion

concept of "operational manoeuvre from strategic distances", which involves bringing forces directly into theatre from the continental US or another location. Cebrowski called these options "the new one-two punch" for US forces.

Officials are looking at high-volume airships, short take-off and landing aircraft, quad-tilt-rotor aircraft and heavy-lift helicopters as potential platforms.